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ABSTRACT

This study examined the amount of perceived stress and its dimensions on 121 elementary and secondary school teachers. Correlations were found between the "Emotional Exhaustion" dimension of stress and gender (males experienced more burnout) and years of teaching (teachers with more years at their present job experienced more burnout). Correlations were also found between the "Depersonalization" dimension of stress and education level (secondary teachers experienced more burnout). Correlations were found between the third dimension of stress, "Personal Accomplishment" and gender, years of teaching, and years at the present job. The years at the present job made a significant contribution to the prediction of the three dimensions of burnout--Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment. The subjects of this study perceived themselves to be in a low degree of burnout in the dimension of Emotional Exhaustion, but highly burned out in the dimensions of Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment. It is suggested that teacher educators should consider changes in their curriculum to encourage the development of an internal locus of control and a more realistic attitude toward students and the administrative structure. Administrators should expand decision making in the curriculum and enhancement of external rewards recognizing competence. (Author/JD)

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TEACHER STRESS - AN ONGOING PROBLEM THAT NEEDS ATTENTION

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TITLE: "Teacher Stress - An Ongoing Problem That Needs Attention"

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SUMMARY: Stress does continue to plague classroom teachers. Our sample of such teachers perceive themselves as highly depersonalized and lacking in personal accomplishment or feelings of achievement in their careers.

Abstract

Our study attempted to determine the amount of perceived stress and its dimensions on classroom teachers as measured by Maslach's Burnout Inventory and the relationship to teacher/education variables determined by demographic questionnaires. Correlations were found between the "Emotional Exhaustion" dimension of stress and gender (males experiencing more burnout), years of teaching (teachers with greater longevity experiencing more burnout) and years at present job (teachers with more years at their present job experiencing more burnout). Correlations were also found between the "Depersonalization" dimension of stress and education level (secondary teachers experiencing more burnout). Correlations were found between the third dimension of stress "Personal Accomplishment" and gender, years of teaching and years at present job in the same direction as previously cited.

Of all the educational factors investigated, only the teacher's years at the present job made a significant and unique contribution to the prediction of the three dimensions of burnout-Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment. This group of classroom teachers (Elementary, n=60; Secondary, n=61) perceived themselves to be in a low degree of burnout in the dimension of Emotional Exhaustion, however, they perceived themselves as highly burned out in the dimensions of Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment.

Since certain forms of stress continue to plague classroom teachers, two approaches can be suggested. Those responsible for teacher education programs should consider appropriate changes in their curriculum to encourage the development of an internal locus of control and a more realistic attitude toward students and the administrative structure. Administrators, also, may want to consider expanding decision-making in the curriculum as well as enhancement through staff development as methods of external rewards recognizing competence within the profession.

Title: "Teacher Stress - An Ongoing Problem That Needs Attention"

Background:

Stress research investigating burnout has identified three dimensions of the phenomena which occur especially within the professions dealing with human services (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach, 1976, 1978, 1979; Maslach and Jackson, 1979; Maslach and Pines, 1977). These three concepts of stress are: (a) Emotional Exhaustion manifested by feelings of being drained or used up, physically fatigued, (b) Depersonalization or an unfeeling and impersonal response towards recipients of one's service and (c) Personal Accomplishment or feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's self and profession.

Teacher stress or burnout has been recognized in many educational settings (Borthwick, 1982; Crane & Iwanicki, 1984; Farber, 1983; Fielding & Gall, 1982; Horton, 1984; Hudson & Meagher, 1984; McIntyre, 1982, 1984). Much effort had initially been focused on the physically and emotionally fatigued dimension of stress. Physical exercise, relaxation periods, temporary withdrawal from direct client/student interaction, work breaks and changes in routines have all been suggested as successful strategies dealing with burnout. Less attention, however, has been directed toward alleviating the Depersonalization or Personal Accomplishment aspects of this problem. These aspects tend to be less under the control of the individual as they frequently involve input from external, significant others (supervisors, principals, parents, etc.). The need to re-examine the degree and type of classroom stress still prevalent currently can thus be recognized.

Purpose:

This study sought to determine:

(a) the degree and dimensions of teacher stress currently prevalent in the classroom setting, and

(b) the effect of specific personal, professional and school related factors i.e. class size, school size, student ability (average, gifted, below average),

teacher longevity, years at present position and teaching level (elementary, secondary) on the contribution to the incidence of burnout in classroom teachers.

Methodology:

Quantitative data was collected using a demographic questionnaire which provided information regarding personal, professional and school characteristic and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) which provides a measure of perceived burnout in terms of three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion, feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work; Depersonalization, unfeeling and impersonal responses towards recipients of one's service, care, treatment or instruction; and Personal Accomplishment, feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work with people. Descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlation and Kendall Correlation and multiple regression analysis were employed to examine the interrelationships among the educational factors and perceived burnout. This study used quantitative data from 121 classroom teachers (Elementary, n=60, Secondary, n=61) from schools in the metropolitan New York area.

Findings:

Results were analyzed in the order of our objectives - prevalence of burnout in the classroom teacher and the effect of personal, professional and school factors contributing toward burnout. The data producing sample of classroom teachers presented the following characteristics (see Table 1): 87 females and 34 males who represented 60 elementary classrooms and 61 secondary. The average years of teaching experience for this group was 13, while the mean years of teaching in their current position was 9, within their middle teaching years. The average school size was 943 students enrolled with an average class size of 29. Educational ability of the students was represented by the following classes being taught: advanced, 8; average, 83; special education, 5; and mixed, 22.

1. As a total sample these classroom teachers perceived themselves to be in a low degree of Emotional Exhaustion (see Table 2). They did, however, perceive themselves to be highly burned out in both the Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment dimensions in both frequency and intensity of feelings. In fact, as a group these teachers were experiencing a greater degree of stress in the dimensions of Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment than those individuals who completed colleg who were used to formulate the norms for the MBI (see Table 2).

2. Significant correlations (see Table 3) were found between the Emotional Exhaustion dimension of stress and gender (males experiencing more burnout), years of teaching (Teachers with greater longevity experiencing more burnout) and years at present job (teachers with more years at their present job experiencing more burnout). Correlations were also found between the Depersonalization dimension of stress and education level (secondary teachers experiencing more burnout). Correlations were found between the third dimension of stress, Personal Accomplishment and gender, years of teaching and years at present job in the same direction as previously stated.

3. Stepwise multiple regression (see Table 4) found the years at present job as showing a significantly unique contribution to the prediction of frequency of Emotional Exhaustion for the sampled population of teachers. Specifically, the Years at present job variable entered on Step 1 and explained 4% of the variance. The other variables failed to enter the equation as they did not reach significance at the .05 level. A similar pattern emerged for both the prediction of frequency of Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment. Therefore, those teachers who had more years at their present job (average 9 years) predicted a greater degree of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment.

Conclusions/Recommendations:

Stress does indeed continue to plague classroom teachers. This group of teachers perceive themselves as initiating unfeeling and impersonal responses

toward their students as well as realizing few feelings of accomplishment and successful achievement from their educational functions. Yet, they have apparently been able to cope with those stress related factors which produce Emotional Exhaustion.

Since secondary teachers were more burned out than elementary teachers, it may indicate interaction with students in the highschools is of a more distant nature perhaps due to lesstime of student contact hours and a greater number of total students. In a similar finding, Borthwick, (1982) suggests that working with adolescents may be more stressful than working with younger students, but this would be in direct opposition to Maslach's (1977) finding that the environment rather than the recipient of one's services was a causative factor for stress. However, his supposition that the environment of the elementary school is more supportive of teachers could indeed be an important consideration. One tends to find a closer employee/employer relationship in the elementary setting and this element of support has been shown to make a significant difference in the reduction of burnout in the work setting (Connolly, 1985; Farber, 1983; Horton, 1984; Hudson & Meager, 1984; McNeely, 1983).

Those teachers who had been teaching longer experienced a greater degree of stress. This finding concurred with that of a large research study investigating the "Aging Teacher Corps" (Liebes, 1984). She in fact regards this period of stress as a "midlife professional crisis." Such a phenomena might account for our most significant finding indicating that those teachers who had more years at their present position were more depersonalized in their instruction and reported less feelings of competance and successful achievement in their careers. Our sample depicted classroom teachers who were just beginning to enter into their middle teaching years (mean = 9 years).

Flint (1982) has characterized teacher burnout as "... the state of exhaustion, despair, and futility which results from the belief that achievement and

satisfaction in teaching is either not possible or not worth the effort required to produce it." Perhaps this typifies the burned out teachers of our sample who are experiencing stress during their middle teaching years. Such stress could either be caused by factors that are within the individual teacher or found within the school environment. From this research, two dichotomous approaches can be suggested. Preservice teacher education curriculum should include content that seeks to develop an internal locus of control and more realistic attitudes towards students and the administrative structure.. This recommendation has also been suggested by previous investigations (Fielding, 1982; McIntyre, 1982). Perhaps this would result in a more effective means of coping with both classroom and organizational stress.

An alternative approach would be that those in authority, principals, department chairpersons and other administrators should seek to rectify depersonalized responses and lack of personal accomplishment by providing rewards and more involvement in the decision-making of the administration of the school. The reward system may take the form of staff development, attendance at workshops and conferences and recognition of a "job well done!" The decision-making could come under the guise of a collegial approach to administration of the school —— especially regarding curriculum. This need has been identified in other teachers sampled (Farber, 1983; Hudson & Meagher, 1984; and Liebes, 1984) and is an area that is within the reach of the administrator to act on and, as a result, to bring about the needed changes. Both strengthening internal coping skills and providing external support systems could be effective approaches towards reducing teacher stress which would benefit the teacher, student, administration and the total educational environment.

TABLE 1

Sampled Population of Teachers Demographic Data

Years of Teaching Experience	M	SD	Years at Present Job	M	SD
	13	8.70		9	6.5

School size	M	SD	Average Class Size	M	SD
	943	5.73		29	7.98

Teaching Level	f
Elementary	60
Secondary	61

Educational Tract	f
Advanced	8
Average	83
Special Ed.	5
Mixed	22

Gender	f
Male	34
Female	87

TABLE 2

Comparison of Sample and Normative Data for Teachers and others who completed College on the MBI

	Emotional Exhaustion		Deprersonalization		Personal Accomplishment	
	frequency		frequency		frequency	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Teachers (sample)	9.132_a	5.60	30.86_c ☆	5.09	20.28_c ☆	5.56
Completed College (norm)	24.66_b	11.21	10.23_b	6.73	34.34_b	7.25
	intensity		intensity		intensity	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
	13.66_a	6.48	33.48_c ☆	4.74	24.33_c ☆	6.90
Completed College (norm)	33.60_b	13.15	13.31_b	7.71	38.18_b	7.83

Note: Normative Date, (Maslach & Jackson, 1981)

a= low burnout
b= moderate burnout
c= high burnout

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TABLE 3

COEFFICIENTS OF CORRELATION BETWEEN TEACHER[a] VARIABLES AND PERCEPTION OF BURNOUT

	Emotional Exhaustion	Depresonalization	Personal Accomplishment
	frequency	frequency	frequency
Gender[b]	-.1927**	-.0309	.1546*
	intensity	intensity	intensity
	-.1467	-.0370	.1799*
	frequency	frequency	frequency
Years Teaching[b]	.1496*	-.1176	-.2117**
	intensity	intensity	intensity
	.0273	-.1188	-.2427***
	frequency	frequency	frequency
Years at Present Job[b]	.2052**	-.0746	-.3152***
	intensity	intensity	intensity
	.0533	-.0759	-.3187***
	frequency	frequency	frequency
Educational Level Taught (Elementary/ Secondary)[c]	.1011	.1843**	.010
	intensity	intensity	intensity
	.0976	.1616	-.0590

Note. [a]n=121 *p <.05 **p <.01 ***p <.001

b=Pearson Correlation

c=Kendall's Correlation

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TABLE 4

Stepwise Mutiple Regression of Teachers'[a] Perception of the Frequencies of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment on Teacher Variables.

EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

Step	Variable	Multiple R	R^2	Increase InR^2	F	Signifiance
1.	Years at present job	.205	.04	———	5.23	.02

DEPERSONALIZATION

Step	Variable	Mutiple	R^2	Increase in R^2	I	Signifiance
1.	Years at present job	.193	.04	———	4.59	.03

PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT

Step	Variable	Mutiple	R^2	Increase in R^2	I	Signifiance
1.	Years at present job	.315	.10	———	13.13	.0004

a=n 121

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